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SUBJECT: NIGERIA: FORMER UNGA PRESIDENT GARBA DIES

1. Major General Joseph Nanven Garba (retired) died Saturday morning, 1 June 2002, of undetermined causes. He was 58. Surviving him are Kate, his wife of six months (and companion for five years before that), five daughters and one son (born to a former wife, Evelyn). Funeral arrangements have not yet been announced, though family friends believe Saturday, 15 June the most likely date. President Obasanjo is likely to attend.

2. As commander of the Brigade of Guards in 1975, Garba was one of the "five colonels" who executed the bloodless coup that toppled the increasingly rudderless regime of General Yakubu Gowon. The colonels asked the triumvirate of Murtala Mohammed, Olusegun Obasanjo and Theophilus Danjuma to assume power. Murtala, Obasanjo and Danjuma pledged to transfer power to an elected civilian government by 1979. Garba became Nigeria's Commissioner for External Affairs. Nigeria was increasingly active in world affairs during Garba's tenure, providing support to liberation struggles in Zimbabwe, South Africa and the remaining European colonies on the African continent. He left that position in 1978 to take command of the Nigerian Defence Academy. He was retired as a Major General in 1980 by the elected Shagari government.

3. He received a Masters Degree in Public Administration from Harvard in 1983. When military rule returned in 1984, Garba became Nigeria's Permanent Representative to the United Nations, a position he held until 1989. During that period, he was also Chairman, United Nations Special Committee Against Apartheid. He was President of the UNGA for the 1991-92 term.

4. In 2000, Garba became Director-General of the Nigerian Institute for Policy and Strategic Studies (NIPSS), the position he held until his death. The NIPSS campus outside of Jos (about three hours by road from Abuja) has become a major center for Government of Nigeria retreats. Garba's dream was to make it a world-class seminar site, and he had received word from President Obasanjo shortly before his death that the NIPSS bid to host the Commonwealth Heads of Government retreat in 2003 had prevailed over two rivals.

5. At a private dinner at his Abuja residence 27 May, Garba was relaxed and expansive, holding forth on a broad range of subjects. Hosting the CHOGM retreat, however, was uppermost in his mind. He had not yet heard from Obasanjo at that time but was confident NIPSS was the only choice. He relished the work that would go into planning the event and the permanent improvements to NIPSS facilities that would result.

6. Born 17 July 1943 in Langtang, a rural part of Plateau State, Garba was raised a Catholic and attended school in Shendam. He was dismissive of dancing and drumming in church, voicing a preference for Gregorian Chants and the Latin Mass. The late Archbishop of Jos, Gabriel Ganaka, one of Nigerian Catholicism's most conservative voices was a close friend. Though several years younger than President Obasanjo and not one of his closest advisors, Garba was among the President's friends and probably exercised some influence.

ANDREWS